Start of Gertrude Weiss Collection

AR 11702

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LEO BAECK INSTITUTE
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Gertrude Weiss Collection (AHC 2607)

(all of the following items are copies if not mentioned different)

1. AHC QI, QII

2. 2 sheets of the ' Chicago Tribune' of 7/1/02, containing " Children who escaped the Holocaust celebrate life" an article by Veronica Gonzales, reporting about GW emigration and life, contains 1 Photo (original)

3. Letter from " DOEW" (Archive of the documentation of the austrian resistance) issued on 4/11/01 in Vienna, informing GW about the fate of her parents (2 p.)

2607

THE AUSTRIAN HERITAGE COLLECTION AT THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE

AUSTRIAN-JEWISH IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA

LEO BAECK INSTITUTE: 15 WEST 16TH STREET, 4TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10011, TEL (212) 744 - 6400

Name: Gertrude — Weiss
First Name / Middle Name / Last Name

Phone: ( ) **Occupation in US:** teacher

Date of Birth: March (Month) 26 (Day) 1927 (Year) **Place of Birth:** Vienna (City) Austria (Country)

Prewar Address: Steingasse (Street) 3rd (District, if in Vienna) Vienna (City) Austria (Country)

Prewar Name: Gertrude Kobler **Maiden Name:** Gertrude Kobler

1. Education/Occupation(s) *(please if possible, indicate institutions and year when entered/left)*

University of Illinois 1949 – 1951 MA

2. Were you affiliated with any kind of organization (Youth, Zionist, Political, etc.)? no (to young)
If so, did you have any specific function? My father worked for the Kultusgemeinde in Vienna.

3. Were you arrested and/or interned? *(please indicate where and when)*

4. What was your route of emigration? *(please indicate places and dates of stay)*

From Vienna to the US, via the Dutch line Veendam.

5. May we contact you again with a more detailed follow-up questionnaire? *(please circle)* (Yes) / No

6. Do you have any documents, such as photographs, letters, diaries, all kinds of manuscripts, etc., that would be appropriate for the archives of the LBI? Yes / (No)

I gave them to the Jewish Museum of Chicago

If necessary please use additional sheets. Thank you!

2607

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AUSTRIAN-JEWISH IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA

LEO BAECK INSTITUTE: 15 WEST 16TH STREET, 4TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10011, TEL (212) 744 - 6400

We kindly ask you to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible, either in English or in German. If you need more space, please feel free to use additional sheets. If you don't know the answer to certain questions or don't want to answer for any reason, just go on to the next question.

NAME: Gertrude Weiss **DATE:** 3/6/03

1. BEFORE MARCH 1938

1.1 Please describe your parental home.
(Did you live in an apartment or in a house? How many people lived there with you? Did you have servants? What language(s) were spoken in the household?)

We lived in an apartment. Our family was composed of 5 people. We did not have servants. Only German was spoken in our home.

1.2 Please tell us about your neighborhood (District in Vienna or area).
(What ethnic groups lived there? Religious life? Relationships between Jews and non-Jews? Relationships with neighbors?)

We lived in dem Dritten Bezirk. Our neighbors were almost 100 percent Catholic. A very small percent were Jewish. The relationship between our neighbors was civil. Things changed after Hitler took over Austria.

1.3 What religious tradition existed in your family?
(Did you keep kosher, go to synagogue, observe holidays, etc.?)

We followed the reformed tradition - although to a very limited degree. My mother went to the synagogue on special occasions, but we did not go regularly as a family. I believe my Dad was an agnostic. He was in World War I and somewhat lost faith (I really don't know if he was a believer before that. He always said that he fasted for a lifetime as a prisoner in Siberia. My mother did keep some of the Jewish Holidays, in a very dilluted manner.

1.4 Please, tell us about your friends and acquaintances ?
(Were they mostly Jewish or non-Jewish? Did you have any close non-Jewish friends?)

I had Jewish and non Jewish friends. Most were non-Jewish. This changed after Hitler came. Non-Jews were not permitted to fraternize with Jews.

1.5 Were you affiliated with any political, social or religious organization?
(Youth Organizations, Zionist Organizations, Political Parties, other organizations)
If so, did you have any specific function?

I was too young to be part of an organization (I was 11 when Hitler marched into Austria) My father was a Socialdemocrat.

1.6 Did you or your family encounter any anti-Semitism in Austria before March 1938?
(If so, please give details.) I really was not that aware of anti-Semitism, but I knew it was present. I know that I heard conversations to that effect.

1.7 What was your/ your family's reaction to Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 and to Nazi activity in Austria in the early thirties? Did you/ they feel threatened by these events? I really don't remember a great deal of conversation about that. Austria had political problems in the 30's. The Social Democrats fought a civil war against the Christian Democrats and in 38 the Nazis took over. I do remember my Dad rooting for Joe Louis. Also I remember my aunt and cousin coming from Germany to Austria (Vienna). They (came) escaped from Germany because of Hitler.

2. FROM MARCH 1938 TO EMIGRATION - FROM EUROPE TO AMERICA

2.1 How was your time spent during and after the "Anschluss"? What was the impact of the "Anschluss" on you personally?
(Were you expelled from school/university? Did you or somebody in your family lose your/ their jobs? Were your apartments/houses looted? Were you (or members of your family) persecuted? Were you/ they forced to scrub the streets?)

I personally was forced to change schools. We could not attend our regular school. The teachers also were taken away, only those known to be anti-Nazi were allowed to teach us. My sister was let go from her job. My other sister also lost her job because she worked for a Jewish owned store and her bosses left for England. My father worked for the Kultus gemeinde, (His official title was) related to burial of deceased jewish people. His stories daily reported the deaths of people by suicide. I remember him coming home and telling us that they picked up a family of six — They gassed themselves. We were always worried that my father would be picked up and not come home. My mother was busy trying to find out if there was any way either the children or all of us could leave the country. She went to the US Consulate and got about 100 names of organizations and name sakes and wrote letters asking for support of a visa to the US. A man from San Francisco sent one for the children.

2.2 How did non-Jewish friends, colleagues, schoolmates, neighbors, etc. behave toward you and your family?

Some friends completely stopped seeing me. They were not allowed to fraternize. One friend (her father was a Social Democrat) did visit me, but that stopped later also. I don't remember about the neighbors. We were just carefully friendly. Other friends did not say hello because that was what they were told to do. Some probably became followers of Hitler's ideas.

2.3 Could you please decribe your recollections of November 9th, 1938, the so-called „Reichs-Kristallnacht" (in case you still were in Austria at that time)

We were still in Vienna at that time. We were fully aware what happened and my parents and and my siblings were all worried. We knew that people already were picked up for deportation to concentration camp. My uncle was among them. Jude was written all over stores – many of those store were destroyed. A temple near us was damaged etc. We were fully aware of the devastation that had taken place. My mother was very actively trying to get all the information that would possibly get our family out of the country. By now my father's hair had turned white.

2.4 Were you or any members of your family arrested? Sent to a camp? (If so, please give details.) I am enclosing a letter that gives information about my parents after we, the four children, left for America

2.5 Can you recall the process of obtaining papers necessary for emigration? (Did you try to obtain visas for other countries as well? Were you supported by any relief organization, by relatives or friends?)

My mother found out that a gentleman from San Francisco was sending affidavits for the children, but not for the parents. My mother stood in line to get the necessary papers sometimes all night long etc.. Everything was made difficult. What made the affidavits possible was my mother's foresight. She went to the American Consulate the day after the Nazis took over Austria (annexed) and applied for quota numbers for the family. The HIAS was the one that contacted the man who sent us the affidavit, I should say sponsored us

2.6 What happened to your (or your family's) apartments, houses, businesses and other property?

We had to move to another address. We did not have a business or any real estate etc. We were not affluent.

2.7 When did you leave Austria? (Please indicate exact date, if possible)

We, my 2 sisters, ~~and~~ brother and I left August 23 1939 for America. We travelled by train to Rotterdam and sailed on the Tenduam, a Dutch vessel. We sailed to New York. The HIAS (a representative of the org.) picked us up from the boat. We stayed in New York for 6 weeks then sent to Chicago. There the Jewish Children Bureau took ours.

2.8 If you did not emigrate directly to the U.S, where did you go first?
(How long did you stay there? Can you give a brief description of your experiences? Was there an immedate reason - apart from the general threat - for your emigration?)

3. THE UNITED STATES

3.1 When did you arrive in the U.S.? (Please indicate exact date, if possible)
September 7 1939 We, my brother and two sisters arrived via the Veendam (a Dutch boat) in the USA.

3.2 Did members of your family emigrate to countries other than the U.S.? No
(If so, where? Where do they live today? Are you still in contact with them?)

3.3 Did you serve in the U.S. Armed Forces or in any other allied army?
(If so, when did you join? What division? What was your area of operation? When were you discharged?)
No. My sister and brother served in the Dutch Grand Army. respectively.

3.4 Please list places and dates of residence in the U.S.
(City, State; in bigger cities, neighborhood)

6 weeks in New York - Bronx - with a Jewish family. Then we were sent to Chicago where the Jewish children's Bureau took over. I remained in a foster home till I was 16. My siblings were soon on their own - finding employment within several months. We all lived on the North Side of Chicago.

3.5 Please describe your occupational situation after your arrival in the U.S.

I went to school, first to Eugene Field (Gramma) School and then to Sullivan High. I entered U of I in Champaign, IL. in the fall of 1945 and graduated in February 1949. I went back to pursue a Masters in the fall of 1949, with the help of an assistantship. During the last two years of high school I worked about 30 hours a week - before that I worked on Saturday and Thursday evenings in a dime store. I also baby sat evenings + "played" for my education with the help of scholarships and work.

3.6 Did you belong to any emigrant/immigrant-related organization or cultural association? (e.g. Austrian American Federation, Austrian Forum, etc.? If so, since when?)

No

3.7 Do you still speak German in the USA? If so, with whom and when? How often? Very little. I only speak when it is absolutely necessary. We made up our minds early to learn English and only speak it during our conversations. On vacations it still comes in handy. I can still converse, but not fluently.

3.8 Would you call yourself religious? To what degree? What is your affiliation? Did it change?
(Do you keep kosher, go to synagogue, observe the holidays,...?)
I call myself a pluralistic cat Jew. I do not follow the religious customs but I consider myself a humanistic Jew. When the children (ours) were growing up they attended Sunday School and were confirmed. Now we are not affiliated with a temple. We contribute to many Jewish organizations and done given to JUF for 47 yrs. I identify with secular Judaism. I do not keep kosher, but our family gets together on holidays.

3.9 Were your friends and acquaintances mostly German-speaking or non-German-speaking? Mainly Jewish or not?
Mostly non German-speaking, but mainly Jewish. We do have long time friend that are not Jewish.

3.10 Of what country (countries) are you a citizen? When was each citizenship granted?
USA While I was in college. I don't remember the exact year.

3.11 Have you ever visited Austria after the war? If so, how often?
(What did you do there? Can you recall some of your impressions during these visits? Have you ever thought of going back permanently?)

I returned to Austria after 50 years. I visited the Jewish cemetary where my Dad worked. My husband and I walked down familiar streets. I showed him my apartment, and where my grandmother lived; also my aunt + uncle etc. (My husband was born in Chicago, USA). We went to many places that I was familiar with e.g. Prater, Ring, Dritten Bezirk etc. I also looked up the monument that was erected in the memory of the Jews, but was terrible disappointed by it. I complained to person working in the Tourist bureau. It was an insult as far as I was concerned. I also visited the Kultusgemeinde but it was closed since it was a Saturday. I looked upon the population as the children of murderers

4. PARTICIPATION IN OTHER ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

4.1 Have you ever been interviewed by any other organization?
(If yes, please indicate when and by which organization?) Yes, One Thousand Children, Inc, article is enclosed.

4.2 Have you ever been mentioned in any historical works?
(Holocaust-related literature, Documentary films, Exhibitions etc.) Not to my knowledge.

5. FAMILY MEMBERS

5.1 Spouse (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth [if deceased, place/date of death], Occupation[s])
Warren H. Weiss Chicago June 2, 1923 engineer

5.2 Mother (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth [if deceased, place/date of death], Occupation[s]) Hermine (Eisler) Killed in Latvia by the Nazis. Kobler
Vienna, Austria (place of birth) June 14, 1896

5.3 Father (Name, Place/date of birth [if deceased, place/date of death], Occupation[s])
Otto Kobler Vienna, Austria Killed in Latvia by the Nazis. Letter enclosed from Vienna informing me of the fate of my parents. It took 56 years to get that information.

5.4 Siblings (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth [if deceased, place/date of death], Occupation[s])
Elisabeth Kobler
Marie Kobler
Alfred Kobler
} Vienna, Austria

Marie died Dec. 18, 1996 in Chicago, IL

Marie bookkeeper in a bank
Elisabeth dressmaker
Alfred baker

5.5 Children (Name, Maiden Name, Address [City, State, Country], Place/date of birth [if deceased, place/date of death], Occupation[s])

Leslie N. Weiss Chicago IL Aug 14, 1957 Law partner in Chicago law firm

Howard W. Weiss, Chicago, IL June 30, 1959 Dr. anesthesiolog Rockford, IL. Head of a pain cli plus head of Department in h hospital.

5.6 Grandparents (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth, place/date of death, Occupation[s])

Both my grandparents were born in Vienna. My grandparents on my mothers side were name Eisler and my father side Kobler. I don't know what my mothers dad did but my fathers family owned a large food store. I don't remember their birthdates

The Austrian Heritage Collection is always looking for people to interview.

If you know any Austrian-Jewish immigrants in the US who might be interested in participating in this project, please either ask them to contact us or write their addresses below.

Trude Lesem (Gruenwald)

Her dad was a well known engineer who helped build reservoirs in the Chicago area. (for electricity)

Thank you very much for participating in this project.

Chicago Tribune

FINAL

156TH YEAR — NO. 182 © CHICAGO TRIBUNE

MONDAY, JULY 1, 2002

50¢

Tribune photo by Pete Souza

Concrete barriers already guard the Washington Monument. Fourth of July security on the Mall will include fences.

Firefighter charged in Arizona blaze

Suspect wanted work, officials say

By Judith Graham
Tribune national correspondent

PHOENIX—In another astonishing twist to an extraordinary fire season, the U.S. attorney in Arizona charged a part-time firefighter Sunday with starting what became a gigantic blaze that ripped through two towns and forced 30,000 people in eastern Arizona to flee their homes.

Leonard Gregg, 29, worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a contract firefighter. According to a statement filed in federal court by a bureau investigator, Gregg said he set the Rodeo fire on June 18 to ensure that he would have summer employment.

"The evidence that we have right now ... is that this fire was started with a profit motive behind it," U.S. Atty. Paul Charlton said.

At a hearing Sunday in federal court in Flagstaff, Gregg said, "I'm sorry for what I did."

Gregg was arrested Saturday night in connection with two fires set June 18 near the Ft. Apache Indian Reservation town of Cibecue. One fire was put out, but the other quickly spread, threatening Show Low and overrunning two smaller

PLEASE SEE **WILDFIRES**, PAGE 10

Arizona Daily Sun photo by Jill Torrance

Leonard Gregg, a contract firefighter, was charged Sunday in the huge wildfire in Arizona.

U.S. on alert for July 4th terror

By William Neikirk
Tribune senior correspondent

WASHINGTON—This will be a 4th of July like all others—and a 4th of July like no other.

When the U.S. honors 226 years of independence Thursday, Americans will celebrate the country's biggest patriotic bash in the usual manner, lighting the skies with brilliant fireworks, unfurling flags, watching parades and gathering with family and friends.

But the first Independence Day since the Sept. 11 attacks will be anything but ordinary. To join in the public festivities, many Americans will find it necessary to conquer their concerns about the potential for terrorism.

Amid vague government warnings about possible attacks, this 4th amounts to a test of nerves for America. Some will choose to stay away from public celebrations, while others "will come to stick out their jaw" to the terrorists, said Rep. Porter Goss (R-Fla.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee.

Although authorities have said they know of no specific, credible threat of terrorist attack, a sense of caution is reflected in the ramped-up security measures that federal, state and local officials are planning on the ground and in the air. In addition to being a little riskier than in the past, this Independence Day could be a major hassle for many revelers.

PLEASE SEE **HOLIDAY**, BACK PAGE

Afghans' Islamic law calls for compassion

But amputations and stonings still included in code

By Laurie Goering
Tribune foreign correspondent

KABUL, Afghanistan—Three years ago, when the fundamentalist Taliban ruled Afghanistan, Morad was arrested with five friends and charged with murder and robbery. At the end of a series of trials, he and the other men were pronounced guilty of robbery, put in chains, blindfolded and told they were being taken to Poli-e-Charki prison on the edge of town.

The van pulled up instead in the infield of Kabul's soccer stadium, where a crowd had gathered for a match. And as Morad watched in horror, a team of Arab doctors amputated the right hands and left feet of his friends as the halftime show at center field. His turn came last.

"I was so afraid," he said as he struggled to strike a match with his left hand and the stump of his right arm.

"I don't want my children, or any children, to face this again," says the 32-year-old, who insists he was innocent and now runs a tiny grocery in Kabul. "We want Islamic law in Afghanistan. But this cutting we do not accept. If the government tries to do this again, I will convert. I don't want this Islam."

As President Hamid Karzai launches a new phase in Afghanistan's return to democracy, he repeatedly has promised—under heavy pressure from fundamentalists—that the nation will be governed under Shariah, the ancient Muslim legal code of the Koran, which sanctions stoning for adulterers, amputations for thieves and other harsh punishments for convicted criminals.

The issue for Afghans is how strictly Shariah will be enforced. The Taliban favored the maximum penalties, and enforced them without the needed proof, but other Afghan rulers have adopted a more compassionate vision of Shariah. The question facing Karzai's moderate, Western-oriented government is where to draw the line.

"This is the law of God. Nobody has a right to disapprove anything in this law," said Abdul Aziz, the suit-clad dean of Shariah at the University of Kabul. "But the Taliban knew nothing of Shariah. They did a lot of things that weren't part of it."

PLEASE SEE **SHARIAH**, BACK PAGE

Tribune photo by Candice C. Cusic

U.S. Atty. Patrick Fitzgerald, who took office Aug. 31, has a reputation for dogged prosecution.

U.S. attorney makes impact

Prosecutions rise under Fitzgerald

By Matt O'Connor
Tribune staff reporter

After an intense few days helping to track a fleeing murder suspect to Boston, U.S. Atty. Patrick Fitzgerald was relaxing at a charity fundraiser late on a Friday when he suddenly realized a search warrant ought to be prepared in the case.

Fitzgerald finished his beer, grabbed the case's prosecutor—who was at the fundraiser—and returned to their offices in the Dirksen Federal Building.

By the time the paperwork was done, it was after midnight.

Vintage Fitzgerald in action, say insiders at the U.S. attorney's office.

In more than nine months on the job, the Brooklyn-born son of Irish immigrants has brought a new vitality to the Chicago office, a willingness unlike any other U.S. attorney in years to roll up his sleeves and work side by side with prosecutors and agents on important cases.

Colleagues call the career prosecutor—the first outsider in four decades to be northern Illinois' chief federal prosecutor—smart, tireless, decisive,

PLEASE SEE **ATTORNEY**, PAGE 13

Children who escaped Holocaust celebrate life

By Veronica Gonzalez
Tribune staff reporter

When 12-year-old Trude Kobler boarded a train in Vienna, clutching her porcelain doll on the eve of World War II, she knew she was leaving to escape the Nazis.

As the train pulled out of the station that day in August 1939, Kobler saw something she'd never seen before. Standing on the platform, her usually composed father bowed his head and wept.

"I don't remember being that unhappy," recalled Kobler, 75, who lives in Wilmette and whose married name is Weiss. "I just assumed I'd see him again." Weiss, who never saw her father or mother after that final parting, was among about 1,200 Jewish children whose parents sent them to the United States to avoid the Nazi threat.

On Sunday some of those children, now adults, gathered in Chicago for a first-ever reunion that runs through Tuesday. More than 150 people, including survivors and their relatives attended the opening cere-

PLEASE SEE **HOLOCAUST**, BACK PAGE

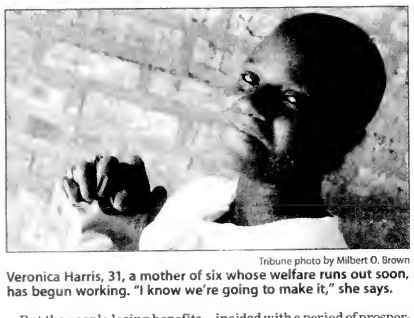
Welfare clock running out for some in Illinois

By Bonnie Miller Rubin
Tribune staff reporter

Five years after passage of the federal welfare reform bill, a few families in Illinois on Monday will become the first to lose cash benefits.

The number of families losing benefits, at least initially, will be no more than eight—far fewer than predicted when the legislation was enacted, according to the Illinois Department of Human Services.

"The end of an era really came when welfare reform became law, but this could certainly be viewed as another milestone," said Reginald Marsh, a spokesman for the department. That so few people are affected—especially when compared with the



Tribune photo by Milbert O. Brown

Veronica Harris, 31, a mother of six whose welfare runs out soon, has begun working. "I know we're going to make it," she says.

But the people losing benefits Monday are just the first. Oth-

incided with a period of prosperity and low unemployment. An

For months, welfare recipients have met with caseworkers, who literally show their clients a picture of a clock illustrating the time remaining on the 60-month lifetime limit for cash assistance. When clients hit their 57th month, they receive a written notice.

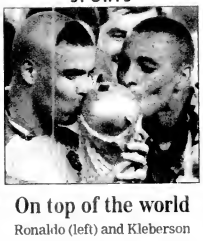
In April, 108 notices were sent to families who would exhaust their benefits in July, August and September, according to the department. The number whose cash payments are stopped may dwindle when some recipients qualify for an exception.

Advocates for the poor say that the true hardship on people on the very lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder has yet to be measured.

"How does welfare reform

INSIDE

SPORTS



On top of the world

Ronaldo (left) and Kleberson kiss the World Cup after Brazil beat Germany for its 5th title.

Salvage operation

Matt Clement strikes out 12 as

TEMPO

Matters of Taste

A Tribune team rates the food, fashion and fiery temperatures at Taste of Chicago.

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Weather: Humid; high 94, low 74
Tomorrow: Humid; high 89, low 69

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Jan. 1, 20[illegible]

FROM PAGE ONE

HOLOCAUST: 'These kids would have been dead'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ny.

Most of their families died decades ago in concentration camps. So did a million and a half children who were unable to leave Europe.

With few instructions, those who escaped boarded trains and traveled distances they could barely comprehend without knowing what lay ahead, whether they would be reunited with their parents.

"[My mother] said to 'look for the woman with the white handkerchief when you get off the train,'" said Manny Steinfeld, 78, another refugee. "'That's the woman who's going to pick you up.'"

This chapter of the Holocaust era, little known today, wasn't highly publicized because of the anti-Semitic climate and isolationism in the U.S. Legislation that would have admitted 20,000 refugee children from Germany was introduced in Congress in 1939 but foundered in committee.

Assisted by various organizations, the young refugees who entered the country arrived legally and received no special privileges.

"The Jewish organizations on the European and American end and Quakers realized there was tremendous hostility toward immigration," said Severin Hochberg, a historian with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

"One way around that was by sending unaccompanied children. People would not object so much if you kind of frame the whole question around children."

Many children lived with foster parents and some with relatives and in orphanages, integrating quickly into American society.

For some, separating from parents and encountering a new culture and family was difficult, even traumatizing.

"After you get here and the excitement wears off, it gets pretty depressing because you're living by a whole new set of rules," said Edith Schumer, 77, who left Germany when she was 12. But many of those children became "inordinately successful" as adults, said Iris Posner, who organized the reunion in the Palmer House Hilton Hotel along with Lenore Moskowitz. Both of them founded One-Thousand Children Inc., a nonprofit group based in Maryland that seeks to document the refugees' stories.

It will be the first time—and probably the last—that the survivors, now in their 70s and 80s, gather as a group, said Posner, a former researcher and healthcare administrator.

Of the roughly 1,200 children who came to the U.S., Posner said she has located 400.

Many were unaware they were part of this special group of Holocaust survivors, making the need to document their experiences more urgent, she said. Some have already died.

"We do hope when this reunion is over . . . that this event will make it a part of Jewish-American history," Posner said.

Judith Baumel, an associate professor of Jewish history at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, has written what is considered the only published historical account about the refugees, a book called "Unfulfilled Promise."

"These kids would have been dead had they stayed in Europe, as were a million and a half Jewish children killed by Hitler and his henchmen," said Baumel, whose older brother and sister were among the refugees who came to this country.

After Hitler invaded Austria, Weiss' mother, Hermine, went to the U.S. Consulate and began thumbing through phone books for every major U.S. city, she said.

Her mom was looking for Jewish organizations and people who shared the family name, Kobler.

One refugee agency, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, found a man in San Francisco willing to pay for Weiss and her two older sisters and brother to come to the U.S.

"If it were not for that, we all would have been dead," Weiss said.

Weiss brought her favorite doll, a gift from her mother's friend.

After the train ride from Vienna, Weiss and her siblings sailed to New York on a boat overflowing with college-age American tourists. She spent about a month with a foster family before coming to Chicago to stay with another family.

She was excited to be in a new country, one with so many opportunities, but she frequently thought about her parents and wrote to them until 1941 when the letters stopped. Both were killed in the ghetto in Riga, Latvia.

"You can actually make yourself dream," Weiss said. "You can think about them long enough, particularly in the beginning, the memory is so deep it comes to you."

Weiss, a mother of three and a substitute teacher in Evanston for 31 years, said the love of her parents stayed with her and helped her succeed.

During high school, she worked at a bakery so she could put herself through the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, where she earned bachelor's and master's degrees.

Steinfeld, who lives in Chicago, was 14 when he left his hometown in Josbach, Germany, in 1938. His widowed mother had secured a visa for him to come to the U.S., also through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

"My mother took me to the train station, and I said goodbye to her," Steinfeld said. "She gave me all these instructions—just remain quiet, just keep reading the book you're reading, don't pay attention to anybody else."

That same year, his younger brother was sent to Palestine while his older sister awaited transport to Britain.

Steinfeld left Germany with a "certain degree of anxiety and fright," he said.

"No one really knew the extent of what the Nazis were planning as far as annihilation or killing centers," he said. "You couldn't imagine what was going to take place."

Steinfeld's sister never made it out of the country. She and their mother were killed in 1945 in Stutthof, a concentration camp in what is now Poland.

His brother was killed in Palestine that same year defending survivors of the concentration camps who were trying to enter Palestine illegally.

In the U.S., Steinfeld lived with his aunt and two cousins in Chicago. He worked in high school, earning enough money to put himself through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Steinfeld, a father of three, went on to start a furniture company.

"I was put on this earth to be a survivor," he said.

Tribune staff reporter Ron Grossman contributed to this report.

Tribune photos by Chris Walker

Ralph Ransenberg (upper left), talks with Werner Michel, Ruth Schnitzer and Trudy Turkel on Sunday during a first-ever reunion of people who escaped the Holocaust in their youth.

Trude Weiss, 75, left Vienna with her three siblings when she was 12. She's been a substitute teacher in Evanston for 31 years.

STIFTUNG DOKUMENTATIONSARCHIV

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To Gertrude Weiss
2207 Crestview Ln
Wilmette IL 60091-2356
USA

Vienna, 11th of April 2001

Dear Mrs. Weiss,

Through the Jewish Community Vienna/Holocaust Information Center, we received your letter of March15, concerning the fate of your parents.

According to our sources, **Otto Kobler**, born on March 24th, 1886, and his wife **Hermine**, born on June 14th, 1896, were deported from Vienna (last address: Second district, Nestroyplatz 1) to ghetto Riga on January 26th, 1942.

In Riga, the former capital of Latvia, there lived 43,000 Jews in 1930, which corresponded to 8.9 % of the population. Excesses directed against the Jewish population followed immediately after the invasion by German troops on July 1st, 1941. After the introduction of numerous discriminatory decrees, and after plunderings and massacres, the ghetto was installed and surrounded by a wall in August 1941. Between the end of November and the beginning of December 1941, 27, 000 Jews, most of them from Latvia, but including about 400 elderly people from Vienna, were shot in Rumbula forest. In this way space was to be provided for new transports from Germany and Austria.

Transports arrived from Austria in Riga with 1,000 Jews on board each after a journey lasting 8 days, on Dec. 3rd, 1941, and on January 11th and 26th and February 6th, 1942. The deportees were put into those areas of the ghetto which had been emptied by the murder programme or else had to perform forced labour in the outpost of Salaspils. The mortality rate of those interned in the ghetto rose sharply because of the frightful living conditions, particularly among the weaker ones, but above all among the elderly and the children. After murder programmes and executions on account of the slightest infringement of rules the ghetto was filled up again and again by new arrivals to capacity.

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In the autumn of 1943, SS units broke up the ghettos and camps in the "Reichskommissariat Ostland". Most of the ghetto inmates were put into Kaiserwald and Stutthof concentration camps, but old people, the sick, children and whoever was declared unfit for work, were murdered.

Only about 800 of the men, women and children deported to Riga survived the selection for forced labour, the ghetto and the various concentrat'on camps, and among them were about 100 Austrian Jews.

I hope that these short outlines can help to clear the circumstances of your partent's death.

For further information, please don't hesitate to contact us!

Yours sincerely

Georg Spitaler

End of Gertrude Weiss Collection